



## Citizen Corps Questions and Answers

**Q: What is Citizen Corps?**

**A:** Citizen Corps is a nationwide grass roots movement to actively involve all Americans in making our communities and our nation safer, stronger, and better prepared for emergencies of all kinds. We all have a role in hometown security and Citizen Corps provides local opportunities for everyone to ***prepare, train, and volunteer!***

**Q: When was Citizen Corps started?**

**A:** Citizen Corps was launched in January 2002 as part of President George W. Bush's USA Freedom Corps initiative to promote a culture of service, citizenship and responsibility.

**Q: What are Citizen Corps Councils and what do they do?**

**A:** State, tribal, and local Citizen Corps Councils bring together the homeland security expertise of our emergency responders with the energy and spirit of volunteer programs, the private sector, and other community stakeholders.

These Councils build on existing resources to develop a strategic plan to foster a connection between citizens and local emergency responders and to involve everyone in making their family and their community safer. Citizen Corps activities are tailored to the unique attributes of the community and take into account the community's potential threats, needs, geography, population density, and population composition. Council responsibilities include:

- Educating the public on their personal responsibility to be better prepared and the important steps they should take right now;
- Providing local training in first aid and emergency prevention, preparedness, and response capabilities; and
- Implementing volunteer programs and activities that support local emergency responders, community safety initiatives, and disaster relief.

In addition, Citizen Corps Councils provide opportunities for special skills and interests; develop targeted outreach for individuals with special needs groups; ensure residents are connected to emergency alert systems; organize special projects and community events; encourage cooperation and collaboration among community leaders; and capture smart practices and report accomplishments.

**Q: What are the Citizen Corps programs?**

**A:** There are five principal programs under the Citizen Corps umbrella, which provide opportunities for citizen participation and support to the emergency responders disciplines of law enforcement, fire, emergency medical and public health, and emergency management:

- The **Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) Program** educates people about disaster preparedness and trains them in basic disaster response skills, such as fire safety, light search and rescue, and disaster medical operations. Using their



training, CERT members can assist others in their neighborhood or workplace following an event when professional responders are not immediately available to help. CERT members also are encouraged to support emergency response agencies by taking a more active role in emergency preparedness projects in their community. The program is administered by the DHS.

- **Fire Corps** promotes the use of citizen advocates to enhance the capacity of resource-constrained fire and rescue departments at all levels: volunteer, combination, and career. Citizen advocates can assist local fire departments in a range of activities including fire safety outreach, youth programs, and administrative support. Fire Corps is funded by DHS through US Fire Administration and is managed and implemented through a partnership between the International Association of Fire Chiefs, the International Association of Fire Fighters, and the National Volunteer Fire Council.
- The **Medical Reserve Corps (MRC) Program** strengthens communities by helping medical, public health and other volunteers offer their expertise throughout the year as well as during local emergencies and other times of community need. MRC volunteers work in coordination with existing local emergency response programs and also supplement existing community public health initiatives, such as outreach and prevention, immunization programs, blood drives, case management, care planning, and other efforts. The MRC program is administered by DHHS.
- The new **Neighborhood Watch Program** incorporates terrorism awareness education into its existing crime prevention mission, while also serving as a way to bring residents together to focus on emergency preparedness and emergency response training. Funded by DOJ, Neighborhood Watch is administered by the National Sheriffs' Association.
- **Volunteers in Police Service (VIPS)** works to enhance the capacity of state and local law enforcement to use volunteers. VIPS also serves as a gateway to resources and information for and about law enforcement volunteer programs. Funded by DOJ, VIPS is managed and implemented by International Association of Chiefs of Police.

**Q: How does Citizen Corps work with other organizations?**

**A:** Citizen Corps welcomes the support of organizations through its Affiliate partnerships. These national Affiliates are non-profit organizations that share the mission of educating and training citizens and providing volunteer opportunities related to community safety and disaster relief. There are also numerous other organizations and programs that participate at the state, tribal, and local level.

**Q: How do the Affiliate organizations work with Citizen Corps?**

**A:** The Citizen Corps Affiliate organizations support the mission to have everyone in America participate in family and community safety by:

- helping to educate citizens on safety measures,
- providing training, and
- offering volunteer opportunities that support emergency responders, community safety initiatives, and disaster relief.



At the national and state level, these organizations promote the mutual goal of public education and citizen participation and help facilitate collaboration at the community level.

At the local level, the resources offered by the Affiliate organizations help Citizen Corps Councils develop a more comprehensive approach to engaging everyone in the community. And by connecting to the Citizen Corps network, these Affiliate organizations find ways to work together and join their efforts to achieve results greater than would be possible as a stand alone program. At list of Citizen Corps Affiliate is on the web at: <http://www.citizencorps.gov/programs/affiliate.shtm>.

**Q: What is the National Citizen Corps Council?**

**A:** The National Citizen Corps Council is made up of leaders from national organizations that represent emergency responder groups, emergency management, volunteer organizations, government, people with disabilities, and the private sector. By promoting the Citizen Corps message to their membership, these organizations encourage their colleagues at the state, tribal, and local level to participate on Citizen Corps Councils and to advance the mission of citizen participation in a safer America. The National Citizen Corps Council is listed on the web: <http://www.citizencorps.gov/programs/partners.shtm>

**Q: What can citizens do to help with hometown security?**

**A:** In this changed world, we all now have the basic civic responsibility to take an active role in making our families safer and to help our communities be safer too. Every individual has the ability – and the responsibility – to be more knowledgeable about the threats we face, to take steps to prepare for them, to improve our emergency skills, and to volunteer our time to support our local emergency responders, and help others in time of crisis.

**Q: Why should citizens take on this responsibility?**

**A:** Major disasters in a community can overload the capabilities of emergency responders, especially during the first 12-72 hours of the response. Having citizens who are better prepared to take care of themselves and others during times of crisis will allow emergency responders to focus their efforts on the most critical, life-threatening situations. On a per capita basis, there is only 1 firefighter (career and volunteer) for every 280 people; there is only 1 sworn law enforcement officer for every 385 people; and there is only 1 EMT/paramedic for every 325 people.

**Q: What are some specific steps that Citizen Corps recommends people should take to be more responsible for their safety?**

**A:** There are some important steps we should all take right now to help ourselves and our family be better prepared for the possibility of a disaster or a terrorist attack. Citizen Corps Councils help educate community residents on these measures and provide critical local information and guidance. These include:

- having emergency supplies kits in the home, vehicle, and workplace,
- practicing family evacuation and communications plans, and
- learning about the natural hazards in the area and the terrorist threats we all now face.



Citizens should also ask questions of their local officials and be involved in the emergency plans for schools, the workplace, neighborhoods, and the community –and we all have to be ready to act according to the plan should an incident occur.

We also have a responsibility to participate in crime prevention practices, such as Neighborhood Watch; make sure that our homes are safe for children, elderly and special needs family members; and implement property damage prevention measures against natural hazards of the area.

**Q: What kinds of training should citizens take?**

**A:** In 95 percent of all emergencies, it is either the victim or a bystander who provides the first, immediate assistance at the scene. Citizens must get training in emergency prevention, preparedness, and response and maintain these skills to help others in a critical situation. Important training includes: first aid, cardio-pulmonary resuscitation (CPR), fire safety, search and rescue procedures, Community Emergency Response Teams (CERT) training, and learning about the Incident Command System. Citizen Corps Councils help make this training available and accessible to all residents of the community.

**Q: What are some specific examples of how citizens can volunteer to help their community through Citizen Corps?**

**A:** Citizens can help support local emergency responders in a variety of ways, from helping with community outreach and education on safety to on-site administrative support to providing surge capacity during an incident or for project specific needs.

There are also numerous opportunities for those with specialized capabilities, such as translation services, post-emergency traumatic counseling, video production, research, landscaping, hazards identification, graphic design, volunteer management, strategic planning, and marketing. And in some communities, volunteers have helped create and even chair their local Citizen Corps Council!

Each community will develop roles for citizens that best meet their needs. And with the added support of citizen volunteers, emergency service providers will have more time to fulfill their highly skilled responsibilities to keep the community safe.

**Q: Who manages this process at the state level?**

**A:** Every state has a designated Citizen Corps point of contact, usually the state emergency management director, homeland security director, or head of the Governor's office on volunteerism. These points of contact are listed on the Citizen Corps website at <http://www.citizencorps.gov/citizenCorps/statepoc.do>. In addition, every state also has a State Citizen Corps Council to coordinate the full range of activities throughout the state.

**Q: Who coordinates Citizen Corps at the national level?**

**A:** The National Office of Citizen Corps is based in the Office of State and Local Government Coordination and Preparedness within the Department of Homeland Security. The National Office of Citizen Corps promotes awareness of the Citizen Corps mission, fosters national partnerships with the Affiliates organizations and the members



of the National Citizen Corps Council, facilitates information sharing, and develops tools and resources for state, tribal, and local Councils. And, as a Presidential initiative, the White House remains committed to the success of Citizen Corps.

**Q: What is the DHS Ready campaign?**

**A:** In February 2003, DHS launched the Ready public awareness campaign to raise awareness about the importance of being prepared before a terrorist attack or emergency occurs and to educate Americans about specific actions they can take to protect themselves, their families, and their communities. This multi-media campaign includes the website, [www.ready.gov](http://www.ready.gov), public service announcements, print advertisements, brochures, and a toll-free number (1-800-BE-READY).

Local Citizen Corps Councils help deliver the Ready campaign message and provide critical localized information on citizen preparedness and prevention.

**Q: How is Citizen Corps funded?**

**A:** Citizen Corps is funded nationally through the DHS Homeland Security Grant Program. On December 4, 2004, DHS Secretary Tom Ridge announced \$2.5 billion in funding through this program, which supports states and local expenditures for planning, training, exercises, and equipment.

While only \$13.5 million of this funding is specifically for Citizen Corps grants, other funding streams, especially the State Homeland Security Program and the Urban Area Security Initiative, may be used to support Citizen Corps activities. Also in support of Citizen Corps, "Public Awareness and Citizen Participation" has been designated a national initiative under this grant program.

Additionally, Citizen Corps Council leaders work with local community members, organizations and private corporations to help fund Citizen Corps activities and programs.

**Q: How can citizens get more information about Citizen Corps and get involved with the Citizen Corps activities in their community?**

**A:** Everyone can visit the website, [www.citizencorps.gov](http://www.citizencorps.gov), to read the overview publication *Citizen Corps: A Guide for Local Officials* and to view an introductory power point presentation. The website also lists every Citizen Corps Council in the country and includes point of contact information and a search function to help you find the Council nearest you.

If a community does not currently have a Council, citizens may contact the State level point of contact, listed at <http://www.citizencorps.gov/citizenCorps/statepoc.do> or get involved by contacting any of the Affiliate organizations active in their community.